Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

October 20, 2019

Old Testament Reading; Genesis 32: 22-31

Responsive Reading; Psalm 121

Epistle Reading; 2 Timothy 3:14 – 4: 5

Gospel Reading; Luke 18: 1 - 8

**Sermon Title: IT AIN’T OVER TILL IT’S OVER**

**By Rev. Jim Gardner**

Summary: Be persistent. Rely on proven methods. Don’t let scatter brain ideas tempt or deter you.

The last time I preached, my sermon was THIS TOO SHALL PASS. In that message I stated that nothing lasts forever whether for good or bad, and that only God remains the same then, now, and always. Today’s message is about what we should do while waiting for the tough times to pass.

One of the great things about the Bible is that it shows that God is not just there for the shining examples of humanity but He is there with and for all of us no matter how questionable our character is.

In our Old Testament Lesson Jacob is a scoundrel. He conned Esau out of his birthright and out of Esau’s blessing of the first born. Fearing for his life Jacob fled to his Uncle Laban and proceeded to con him out of his best livestock and a bunch of wealth. Now Jacob would have to flee back to his homeland and face Esau.

Jacob set up an elaborate plan to bribe Esau into sparing his life but just in case that did not work he split up his family and possessions into two separate camps hoping that some of his family would survive. Jacob then crossed the brook and spent the night alone. That night Jacob wrestled with a man i.e. God, all night long. In the story Jacob would not let God go until God blessed him. God changed his name to Israel and blessed him.

Just a side note, Jacob asked God what his name was and God for all practical purposes told Jacob that that was none of his dingy-dong business.

Jacob/Israel [the ex-scoundrel] went on to be the father to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jacob was facing tough times and he wrestled with God all night. I think that all of us have faced tough times and wrestled with God all night looking for direction and/or reassurance; at least I know that I have. If God will come through for Jacob, I am sure He will come through for us.

In our gospel lesson Jesus tells of a widow that keeps bugging an unscrupulous judge until he hears her case and awards her due compensation.

Jesus says that if an unscrupulous judge would respond to constant pressure how much quicker would our good Heavenly Father respond to our earnest prayers and petitions?

That said, how do we know how to pray? Not only how do we pray but also how do we live?

This is not a new question. Paul addressed it in our Epistle reading. Now that we know that this is the crux of what my message is speaking to, let me re-read it for you.

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

That was then, AND, that IS now.

In the time of Paul there were several false prophets and false teachings that went directly against the idea of a loving all powerful God that is unchanging. God is the same then, now, and always. God’s unchanging message is, Love God with all your heart, mind and soul and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Know that God is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and that God is good all the time and that God has got this.

If you start from this premise as your parents and the Bible {Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth} have taught then you will have the confidence that the God of angel armies has always got your back. If God be for us, who can be against us?

We live in a time of “itching ears” and questionable teachings and renegade teachers. We have people who challenge our ideas on love and duty, and work ethic. We have people who say and may even believe that if we believe in God then we must be mentally ill. We have volatile politics and interest in ancient aliens, people who would erase history and others saying we should maintain history as a serious teaching tool. We have teachers that advocate hate and retribution and the silencing of anyone who disagrees with them. Then of course we have people that make a religion of hating haters.

I do not believe that this is the way God wants us to face life.

God says that we are to “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, extort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” With all longsuffering and teaching. That means with love and patience. That means expressing yourself as what you believe and not as what they must believe. If a conversation is a screaming match that might not be the conversation that God wants you to be a part of. Maybe God wants you to hold off till cooler heads prevail. “Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

As a Christian, God expects us to be a reflection of him.

The scariest line in all our scriptures this morning is the last line of the Gospel lesson.

“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

Will we be living the love of God through the tough times and will Jesus find Faith when he comes?

It ain’t over till it’s over. Be persistent. Be patient. Rely on proven methods. Don’t be tempted or detoured by the world but be guided by The Rock of Ages, Our God, Our Savior, and Our friend Jesus Christ.

Hallelujah and Amen